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Terena

[Chaco Period]

THE TERENA

on agriculture became even less important. Conditions of the physical environment and cultural contacts, therefore, help to explain the economic readjustments which the Terena appear to have made in the Chaco.

Geographically the region formerly occupied by the Terena belongs to the great depressed plain of the upper Paraguay River known as the Chaco. The northeastern part of this plain is characterized by vast swamps relieved here and there by low crystalline hills. This part of the Chaco, too, has greater precipitation than the semiarid central Chaco. The Terena speak of their Chaco home as being wet and refer to dangers from floods. Although the annual rainfall here is estimated at 50 inches, it must be remembered that the rains fall from October to May, the remaining months being extremely dry. In the summer months, temperatures may reach over 100° F. During the winter months of July and August cold winds blow from the south, often bringing below-freezing temperatures.

This part of the Chaco is classified as savanna, swampy near the Paraguay River but merging into scrub forest to the west, with denser "galeria" forests lining the more permanent water courses. In the past, this region was particularly rich in plant and animal life which could be readily converted to human use. Among the wild plants which were of subsistence value to man were such trees and shrubs as the algarroba (*Prosopis*), the acacia, the Barbary fig, the chañar (*Gourliea decorticans*), mistol, the wild orange, and a wide variety of palms. Wild rice grew in the swamps. Locusts and the larvae and honey of bees were used. The scrub forests and swamps were the home of such animals as the deer, peccary, tapir, capybara, and the jaguar. Land and water birds were plentiful, and the rivers were stocked with many varieties of fish as well as turtles and shellfish.

Discussing the resources of the Chaná (Guaná), Sánchez Labrador says:

> The "Palo Santo" is the most widespread tree. They employ the hardwood of this tree to make spades to use in their fields, and pipes to smoke tobacco, which they appreciate very much. Birds are more abundant on the west bank of the river than on the east bank. The birds feed in the fields of the Chaná. They hunt many birds

[TEXT CONTINUES ON P 8-A]

[P.6-B]

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From this account it would appear that the Arawak-speaking people in this area were no longer [178] using the large oval-shaped straw-thatched house which is still used by many of the Arawak-speaking people to the north. The covering used may [824] have been made from "piri," a species of bulrush, which the Terena still use for making mats. This type of house was easy to dismantle and move, which may account for the probable abandonment of a more permanent type of structure.

Sánchez Labrador then goes on to describe the inside of the house:

> Each captain lives together with his brothers and their kin in one house. . . . Every house has five doors, in order that no one should get in each other's way. There is one door at each end and three on one side. When it [354] rains, they cover their doorways with mats of rushes. Near the doors are the fireplaces and kitchens, which are no more than three movable stones, which act as a tripod [352] on which they place their curiously worked pots. The food is cooked without any other spices than water. At [352] the back of the house are the beds, that is, mats spread [513] over the floor. It is astonishing that although these [248] people grow cotton they do not use hammocks. [Ibid., vol. 2, p. 276.]

In 1845, when the first groups of the Terena were already near Miranda in Brazil, we get a more definite description of Terena houses from Castelnau: 361

> In the village there are about 100 to 120 houses, joined to each other. They are long huts forming a circle around a big square. They resemble great "ranchos" covered with immense roofs of palm fronds. [Castelnau, 1850-59, vol. 2, p. 391.]

As to weapons and the interior of the house, Castelnau has this to say: 411 352

> The weapons of these people are spears with iron points, clubs, bows, and small arrows, and the "bodoque," an instrument which resembles a bow but has two cords united by a piece of leather in the middle on which stones are placed for shooting. In the inside of each hut there is a [513] bed made of a platform of cane, supported by four stakes, which is covered with a hide of a bull. [Ibid., vol. 2, p. 402.]

The passages just quoted give us a general description of Terena houses. The descriptions are nearly 100 years apart. Sánchez Labrador states that the occupants of the house slept on the floor, while Castelnau states that they slept on skin-covered platforms. The Terena say that they did not use hammocks until recently and that they slept on bamboo platforms, *ipé*, covered with skins or reed mats called *hitúri*. 114 352 513

* [work published in 1850-59, see bibliography, p. 69 -- Analyst]

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beans, which they leave to take care of themselves. When they think that the crops ought to be matured, they send a messenger to find out. If these inspectors bring good news, they will return to their settlements and look after their fields. [Sánchez Labrador, 1910–17, vol. 2, p. 258.]

The first rains of the season, usually in late September or October, gave the signal for planting. Lands selected for cultivation were first cleared of trees, underbrush, and grass with an ax (originally made of stone but in post-Columbian times of iron). The trees and bushes were then burnt and the ashes scattered over the field. With a digging stick, *ilome'i*, made from the wood of the "palo santo," the cultivator would then dig the ground, squatting on his heels, moving from place to place until the field was turned. With the coming of the Spaniards the Terena claim they began to use iron hoes and even a simple iron-shod wooden plow drawn by oxen. After the field was prepared the Terena waited for the first rains before putting in the seed. "We waited," they say, "until the first flowers appeared on the trees."

The above information checks closely with what Sánchez Labrador observed in the middle of the eighteenth century:

> The Chané are a good-humoured, modest people. They have a peculiar way of cultivating the land. With the above-mentioned spades they dig and weed, not as the Spaniards do, but sitting down. Their spades have handles one and one-half yards in length. The Chané sit down and work with their spades as far as they can reach and then move along until all the land has been prepared for planting. They cultivate manioc, maize, beans, squashes, sweet potatoes, tobacco, and some cotton. [Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 291–292.]

The economic unit was the family or household, which consisted of the husband and wife, the children, and, in some cases, the sons-in-law. The clearing and digging of the land were performed by men. Women and children assisted in planting, weeding, and harvesting. Cotton seeds, for instance, could be planted only by women.

The principal crops grown by the Terena were maize, sweet and bitter manioc, caré, beans, sweet-potatoes, pumpkins, gourds, sugarcane, cotton, and tobacco.

Maize (soporó).—The Terena distinguished at least three kinds of maize: A long-eared yellow maize called *hianketi-soporó*, a white variety called *heopuiti-soporó*, and a mixed-colored ear called *kuati-soporó*. Maize was planted at the beginning of the rains and was ready for use 3 to 6

[P. 11-A]

[Banana Village]

cold spells the people sit around fires in the early morning to keep warm. 352 513

Containers found in the houses are of the following types: 415

(1) Netted bags made from *yulú* fibers used for carrying and storing sweetpotatoes, maize, and other garden produce. Small bags are called *veri* and the large ones *nimaké*. These bags can be carried on the back or used as saddlebags. The mesh averages 4 inches and the size of the twine varies with the size of the bag, generally being about the size of heavy cotton fish netting. [286] [482]

(2) Round baskets of various sizes plaited from thin strips of wild bamboo or other wild cane. Some of the larger baskets have handles, so that they can be hung from a peg in the wall to keep dogs and chickens from taking the contents. [285]

(3) Large wide-mouthed clay pots for storing water, ranging from 1 to 4 gallons in content. These pots are made by the coil method and are unglazed and undecorated. It is reported that in the neighboring village of Cachoeirinha some of the Terena glaze and decorate these large pots. [323]

(4) Flat, glazed pottery dishes are also found. These are of a dark-red color, without decoration, and are used for serving food.

(5) Cast-iron pots purchased in Taunay are widely used for cooking food. [252] [439]

(6) Empty kerosene cans are always in demand for storing water and meal. Any empty can is readily accepted by the Terena.

(7) Calabashes of various sizes cut to form cups and ladles are used for many purposes. Chimarron or maté tea is drunk from calabashes. [824] [272]

(8) Flat iron pans about a yard in diameter are supplied by the Post for toasting manioc meal. [252] [439]

(9) Wooden mortars with wooden pestles for grinding dried maize or dried meat stand in every back yard. The mortar is a round block of wood about 3 feet long and 18 inches in diameter, hollowed out in one end to the depth of 8 or 10 inches. The block is set upright, and maize is placed in the hollow and pounded with a heavy wooden pestle about 3 or 4 feet long; a common sight every morning is to see women at the rear of the houses pounding out the corn meal or dried meat required for the day. 415 412 252

(10) In some houses a few porcelain cups, glasses, and table knives and forks are seen. 415

she has spells of nausea and is particular about her food. In general the mother of a young woman informs her about her condition. The Terena have two words for pregnancy, *ikaikoné* and *kochuechâti*. The Terena distinguish between a married man who is a father and one who is not, a father being called *iná* and a childless man, *móa*. 843 [192]

In the past, infanticide and abortion were practiced. Whether this was an original Terena custom or was taken over from the Mbayá is not certain. As the Arawak-speaking Guaná did not practice infanticide there is a strong likelihood that the Terena took over this custom from the Mbayá. The explanation the Terena now give for infanticide is that it permitted a family to have male and female children alternately. If the first child was a boy, the second should be a girl and if a boy was born, he was put to death by being strangled at birth by the midwife. If a family had too many children, or if children were inconvenient, the expectant mother would go to a shaman who would make her drink a beverage prepared from certain roots. If this failed the mother might still have the child strangled. If a male child was due to survive, twins, if they were a boy and a girl, were accepted; but if both were boys one would be killed. Twins were due, they believed, to the fact that the mother had eaten double fruits. 847 [177] [842] [756] [845]

If the child was wanted, the mother, in the past, gave birth in her own home, attended by her mother or mother-in-law. Shamans were called only in cases of difficult birth. The husband must cut the umbilical cord, *urú*. As far as the Terena remember, no special knife was necessary to perform this act. The *urú* was later used as a charm in cases of difficult birth by being placed on the abdomen of a woman giving birth. In order to give birth the mother squatted on her heels, supporting herself by holding on to some stationary object. The midwife would massage her abdomen and assist in the removal of the child. The midwife then washed the child and gave it to the mother; she then rested for 6 days before resuming her duties. 844 [756] [845] [789] [846]

After the child was safely delivered the husband would go out in search of "palmito de bocaiuva" for his wife, for these palm shoots were believed to induce a bountiful supply of milk. It was the duty of the paternal grandfather to give a name [262] [824] 553 603

/39 cont./

842 There is no rule as to whether births of boys are preferred to births of girls or vice versa: such a preference depends on individual taste.

584 If a boy is courting a girl, he makes a speech to her, which one can translate approximately as follows: "I wish, I love this woman, I would like to be married, I wish, I wish, I love." -- If the girl is in agreement with him, she declares, short and sweet: "I want to." -- Then the mother of the boy goes to the mother of the girl to ask for her, and the father of the boy goes to the father of the girl. The boy gives his parents-in-laws gifts, 836 and they respond with gifts. Pre-marital sexual intercourse does 585 not take place. When the marriage is to be consumated, the 833 future husband hears from his father, and the future wife from her mother, that for coitus one should lie on the side, and, indeed, /40/ facing each other. "First you must do it that way for it has been done that way since the beginning of the tribes; later you may do it as you please."

842 If there are not to be children immediately, the woman takes [825] a preventive: she roasts a certain snail, places the juice of it [824] in the morning dew, and drinks it very early in the morning. For the same purpose, she can also eat a certain small forest-fruit, which smells like the abacaxy (therefore like a pineapple), but only when it is ripe.

578 Formerly there were no quarrels between man and man, man 178 and woman, or woman and woman because of jealousy; today they do occur.

461 There are women who are lazy. Then the man does her work. But there are also men who are lazy and have their work done by the woman.

115 I have my informant, who first was called Kalapití and later [126] Nakilí, to thank for a few texts of myths which I surely could [114] not have learned from any other Tereno. I shall publish them at another place. I also have him to thank for the information concerning the succession of the chiefs, which without doubt no other Tereno could have given me so thoroughly and completely. For

/407 cont./

323 pattern is painted with palosanto resin on the still red-hot vessel. Later, when the crockery has cooled, the design is completed
415 with red and white paint. In all the huts one finds clay utensils in every possible shape and size and suitable for every possible purpose. I saw bowls of over a meter in diameter, which are used for the preparation of mandioca flour. I would gladly have taken a few of them with me, but it was impossible for me to
323 transport them. Both sexes, moreover, make pottery, but the
462 impressing of the patterns, as well as painting them, falls to the women.

285 The men take care of plaiting baskets and hats. The baskets
294 are usually made of split bamboo, whereas the material for hats
[462] is obtained from the dried leaves of a fan palm--called
[824] carnauba. The hats find a good market in Miranda and, despite
[437] the cheap price, leave nothing to be desired with regard to durability.

585 A wedding is celebrated in two ways. The older ceremony
[178] is gradually dying out, since the culture is progressing mightily
[411] and the rifle will soon have driven out the bow and arrow. The ceremony is the following: toward noon six girls, all adorned with feathers and painting, go to the bridegroom's hut. The latter hands over bow and arrows to them, whereupon the girls, singing and dancing, bring these weapons to the bride and then go home. After sundown six young men, adorned in the same manner, fetch the bridegroom and, dancing and singing, lead him to the bride's hut. As soon as he enters the hut, he extends his right hand to the bride and the marriage is concluded.--
585 More common, however, is a second type of marriage ceremony,
273 for at it there is caña to drink. All the members of the family gather in the hut of the bride, and likewise in the bridegroom's house. Thereupon the bridegroom with his whole family goes to the hut of the bride. In front a large basket-bottle of caña is borne; behind it follow the musicians who play the yntaca and ujoe, and finally the bridegroom with the rest of the family. The bride sits on a hammock and also has a large bottle of caña

/88 cont./

162 In the municipio of Miranda there exist several tribes of
103 Indians, the largest of them being that of the Terena Indians, who occupy sundry aldeas, which are: Agachy, Cachoeira, Cachoeirinha, Bocaina, Ipeque, Morinha, and Santa Ana.

433 The Terena are agriculturalists and are especially engaged
28 in the making of manioc flour; in general they are very in-
323 dustrious, they weave cotton, making nets and other fabrics;
439 from the palm they braid hats, large baskets, sifters, and mats;
[241] from the pita /agave/ and other fibrous plants, the cordage for
[824] weaving bags, in which they transport their products to market; from clay they make platters, dishes, ollas, and many other vessels for domestic use. They exchange their products for beverages and fancy articles. To take their products to market they go in large groups, directed by the cacique.

142 With regard to their stature there are tall, average, and short ones. There are very few tall ones, but they are all
[165] strong and muscular. The men are very ugly for the most part, the women passable, and they attain a very advanced age.
162 The proportion of the two sexes is one-third for the male and two-thirds for the female.

291 Most of them go about completely naked and the most
177 civilized cover themselves with clothing given them by strangers.

847 - Birth. They customarily kill the first child, if it is a
648 male, /89/ so that the Christians may not take it as a slave;
562 women are very much valued among them. They accompany
844 the birth of a baby with great fiestas, which always end in
[525] drunkenness.

To give birth the woman goes to the woods, where she makes an excavation about 45 centimeters long by 35 centi-
[847] meters wide, which is lined with palm leaves. In this excava-
[846] tion they give birth, and if the baby is a male they kill it at
[262] once, using the excavation itself as a grave, after which they go to the river to bathe and then submit to a rigorous diet, eating only the heart of the palm called palmita.